

Experiences of and preparedness for Intercultural Teacherhood
in Higher Education : non-specialist English teachers' positioning,
agency and sense of legitimacy in China

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This article focuses on a case study of English language teachers, who are asked to teach intercultural communication to mixed classes of local and international students in Chinese Higher Education, although they do not specialize in this complex field. They were interviewed to find out about their experiences and perceptions of this 'improvised' Intercultural Teacherhood. The study shows that their engagement with intercultural communication differs while the presence of international students has a major impact on all the teachers' identity and sense of legitimacy. The paper ends on recommendations for (research on) preparing teachers to teach IC.

China; higher education;
Intercultural communication;
teacher identity;
teacherhood

Tässä artikkelissa keskitytään tapaustutkimukseen englannin kielen opettajista, joita pyydetään opettamaan kulttuurienvälistä viestintää suomalaisten ja kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden Kiinan korkeakoulussa, vaikka he eivät ole erikoistuneet tähän monimutkaiseen alaan. Heitä haastateltiin kokemuksistaan ja käsityksistään tästä 'improvisoidusta' kulttuurienvälisestä opettajuudesta. Tutkimus osoittaa, että heidän sitoutumisensa kulttuurienväliseen viestintään eroaa toisistaan. Kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden läsnäololla on suuri vaikutus kaikkeen opettajien identiteettiin ja legitimiin tunteeseen. Artikkelin päättyy suosituksiin (tutkimukseen) opettajien valmistamisesta opettamaan IC.

Internationalization is often seen as a positive multifaceted phenomenon in 'today's' accelerating globalization (de Wit & Altbach 2020). In Higher Education (HE), internationalization, in its complex forms (e.g., study abroad, internationalization at home, distance education), has become the norm and gives out good points for international rankings (Lim & Ørberg 2017). In order to deal with the changes triggered by this global phenomenon, teaching (about) interculturality appears to have become the ~~same~~ ^{new} ~~norm~~ ^{norm} of HE around the world. As such HE teachers and scholars from different disciplines are often required to teach it in the fields of applied linguistics, intercultural encounters, communication studies and even health care (amongst others, see Tournebise 2012).

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This article focuses on the experiences of teachers of interculturality in Chinese HE. Through the help of China's economic rise and the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative since 2013, the internationalization of Chinese HE has also become a major trend (Tian 2020). According to the Outline of National Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Planning (2010-2020) (Ministry of Education, 2010), in order to meet the complex requirements of internationalization, Chinese HE needs to focus 'solid English language skills, proficiency in language skills and cross-cultural communication skills, and knowledge of international economic and trade knowledge and norms'. These have accelerated the provision of intercultural education and training in China: universities being required to foster local and international students' intercultural awareness and enhance their intercultural competences as learning objectives. Many courses and programs have been designed under the labels of 'intercultural', 'multicultural', 'bilingual' teaching and learning, using English as an academic lingua franca in the classroom. However, the introduction of intercultural communication in China is often said to have been late compared to leading Western universities and to lack paradigmatic and methodological sophistication, causing tensions and difficulties amongst teachers (Sun et al. 2021, p. 4). Tensions seem to come from the lack of university teacher preparation and professional development for interculturality. Teachers often need to improvise by acquiring knowledge about the notion quickly, without being aware of the different kinds of ideologies prevailing in the field of interculturality (Dervin, 2014, 2016). For instance, globally dominating 'Eurocentric' / 'Western' / 'Anglo-European' models such as those of Byram (1997) have been widely adopted by teachers and, sometimes, mixed together with e.g. Chinese philosophical perspectives (Peng et al. 2020, Sun et al. 2021, pp. 132-441). More critical perspectives such as non-essentialism and critical Chinese 'minority' perspectives are also used in China (e.g. Yuan et al., 2020). However, in general, the compulsory use of (mostly Western) textbooks of intercultural communication in Chinese universities does not always facilitate renewed engagement with the notion of interculturality.

Globally, there appears to be a lack of systematic research on both HE teachers' experiences of intercultural communication education and on their preparedness to teach it. The few previous studies from other countries highlight a picture of internationalization and intercultural communication education, which is not always promising. For example, Tønnesen (2006) shows that a shift from Danish to English, and having to teach multicultural classes, affects the quality and quantity of classroom IC in Denmark. Furthermore, Vaccarino and Luzzo (2019) discuss the lack of intercultural training of HE staff and suggest building internationalization capability through an intercultural communication workshop that encourages self-reflection. Likewise, in one of the only systematic reviews of intercultural communication education in higher education, taking the Finnish context as an illustration, Tournebise (2012) shows that teachers lack formal training for teaching intercultural communication, seem unaware of the paradigms that they promote in their class and tend to blend in essentialist, culturalist, and critical perspectives. At the same time, these teachers seem to think that they share a common view about what interculturality is about (Tournebise 2012). Tournebise's study shows that her context of study is also unable to cater for coherent and systematic intercultural communication education in higher education, by adopting a neoliberal perspective, whereby teachers can teach what they wish, even if their perspectives can at times be on the verge of neo-racism (Tournebise 2012).

Most of what these few studies show is that internationalization can be experienced negatively by HE teachers involved in IC teaching: lack of proper training and professional development, change of teaching language, introduction of different audiences, and curriculum changes. In the context of this study, China, we focus on teachers who represent the main contributors to IC teaching in higher education: teachers of the English language, who are non-specialists of IC but are asked to improvise its teaching by delivering courses on IC as part of the English curriculum. Some factors have led to these teachers' problems: they have to teach something new in English, a topic that they do not specialize in and they have to face a change of audience,

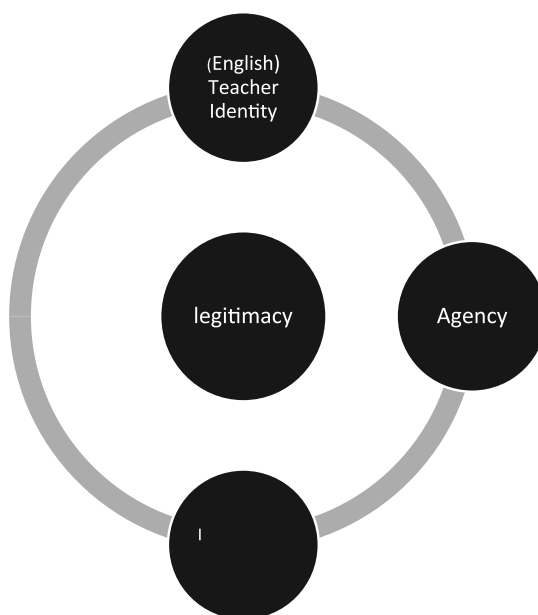
from all Chinese to a mix of Chinese and international students. Very little is known of the experiences of these teachers.

A case study of English teachers working with students specializing in English at university is proposed in this paper. Not meant to generalize the specific experience of English teachers who do not specialize in IC in China (considering the complexity of Chinese HE), this article is based on data collected at a top university of finance, where IC is taught as a compulsory component in the English language curriculum. Using positioning theory and its interplay with teacher agency and legitimacy, as well as the notions of teacher identity and teacherhood, we are interested in their experiences of teaching IC within the framework of their institution internationalization. The teachers' preparedness to teach IC is also of interest. Enunciative pragmatics (e.g. Angermüller, 2011), which is well-tted for analyzing the teacher's positioning and acts of agency, is applied to the data.

This section serves as a conceptual and theoretical background to the study. Figure 1 describes a framework containing two intersecting sets of concepts and notions that will be problematized here: A (continuum 1): English Teacher identity and Intercultural Teacherhood and B (continuum 2): Positioning, Legitimacy and Agency.

Considering the specific context and characteristics of our study, we propose to focus on the continuum of (English) teacher identity and Intercultural Teacherhood. We argue that it is within this continuum that the English teachers under review experience teaching IC.

The concept of teacher identity has been discussed in the global literature for decades and has been explored in multiple ways. In a systematic review of the literature from the 2000s Beauchamp



and Thomas (2009) show that teacher identity refers to first, teacher's reinvention of themselves; second, the narratives they construct to describe their job; third, the discourses in which teachers are embedded, created by themselves or by others about the teaching profession; and fourth, the impact of various elements on teachers. For another scholar, Keller (2017, p. 20), teacher identity represents 'The lived experiences, personal and professional beliefs, and dispositions that impact the personhood of a teacher'. What all these elements seem to indicate is that teacher identity is something fluid, adaptable and changeable, but of which teachers are in control, having been educated to sustain having to reinvent themselves (e.g. use of a new textbook, curriculum change), to face potential critiques from colleagues, parents and society at large.

As qualified teachers of English working with English majors in a prestigious institution, which composes a strong core English teacher identity for them (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009), we argue that the teachers who are part of our study are ready to navigate through these different aspects, especially when it comes to teaching the English language and preparing students to communicate in the language. Going back to Keller (2017) definition, English teacher identity here is thus understood as the experiences, beliefs and dispositions that reinforce teacher's feeling of being ready, qualified and legitimate to stand in front of a class.

However, since our study examines an extreme case of change for teachers, triggered by internationalization of global and Chinese HE, we feel that another dimension, for which their English teacher identity may not prepare them (even in its variability), needs to be added: Intercultural Teacherhood. As asserted in the introduction, in the Chinese context, it is common for teachers of English in higher education to teach some courses on IC since the topic is part of the curriculum. However English teachers, who might have majored in different fields such as language education, applied linguistics, translation, but also literature, are not systematically trained for IC during their university studies – or may not have any knowledge of IC at all. What is more no pre-professional development courses on IC are provided when they start teaching in higher education. Therefore, teachers need to improvise the teaching of IC, usually on the basis of a textbook and some extra materials they might have identified. Considering the complexity of the field of IC, with its many and varied ideological and political perspectives (DeWolfe, 2016; Dervin & Simpson, 2021; Holliday, 2010), having to teach IC could represent a non-negligible extra burden, which can question a strong (English) teacher identity.

In this paper, Intercultural Teacherhood thus comes as a complement, as an opposite pole to English teacher identity (while forming together a potential 'successful IC teaching'), to analyze the experiences and preparedness of the teachers. To us, unlike teacher identity, teacherhood refers to having to teach something as non-specialists, exploring its characteristics, learning what it is about and finding ways to transfer knowledge to others. Although IC becomes part of the teachers' English teacher identity somehow, Intercultural Teacherhood hints at the teachers' potential lack of preparedness and thus unstable perceptions of who they are as English teachers who have to self-learn and improvise about the IC field. Intercultural Teacherhood represents a potentially disrupting part of teacher identity as it introduces extreme change in the classroom for the teacher. One could argue, however, that, with time, experience, self-learning and cooperation with other teachers/specialists, Intercultural Teacherhood can become part of English teacher identity.

As we argue below, individuals constantly position themselves self-consciously as agents in their relationship to action and community (Harré, 1983 p. 108). Intercultural Teacherhood can have an influence on their active teacher identity formation and legitimacy. In the study, the participants are all highly qualified teachers of English, who need to juggle with an educational aspect which potentially threatens their English teacher identity: Intercultural Teacherhood.

In the early years of teaching, a sense of competence and the recognition of competence by others is important to confirm and develop teachers' identity (Lankveld et al. 2016). It is mostly through

others (students, colleagues) that the quality of teacher identity is ~~rooted~~ ^{formed}. In this section, we deal with three important interrelated phenomena that mediate continuum 1 (English teacher identity and Intercultural Teacherhood): positioning, agency and legitimacy. All three are other-centered, i.e. they process and result from the presence of others in the negotiating of English teacher identity.

We start with positioning, which can allow us to understand how positions and actions shape social structures as interlocutors engage in storylines (Davies & Harré 1999). It is important to note that the term 'position' does not just refer to static roles, but also 'dynamic aspects of encounters in contrast to the way in which the use of "role" serves to highlight static, formal, and ritualistic aspects' (Harré & Langenhove 1999 p. 32). We thus hypothesize that positioning is an important mediator between English teacher identity and Intercultural Teacherhood.

Davies and Harré (1999) theorized two types of positioning which will be important in our study: re-existential and interactive. Re-existential positioning relates to an individual assigning positions to themselves. Interactive positioning is an individual assigning positions to themselves while relating to others (Davies & Harré 1999). These phenomena are multifaceted, dynamic, and ~~acting~~ ^{co-acting} at the same time. According to positioning theory (Davies & Harré 1999) people constantly transform as the context changes in the process of interaction. However, when people do not accept or inhabit their interactively assigned position, they may attempt to reject them and/or impose their own. People thus claim the right or a duty to challenge their initial positioning by engaging in what Kayi-Aydar & Miller call 'repositioning' (2018 p. 81). They may also deny or allow others the right to challenge their interactively assigned positions. This repositioning process occurs in any changes of circumstances (Harré & Moghaddas 2003), and is an ongoing negotiation of self and others, enabling possible actions in social interaction (Harré 2002). The three processes of re-existential, interactive positioning and repositioning will allow us to examine how the English teachers whom we interviewed navigate this continuum of English teacher identity and Intercultural Teacherhood.

Linked to positioning is the concept of agency. Agency is ~~noted~~ ^{understood} as the capacity of people to act purposefully and ~~reactively~~ ^{proactively} on their world' (Rogers & Wetzel 2013 p. 63). For teachers, agency is their abilities, roles and beliefs to act in new and creative ways to make strong judgements and intentional actions according to internal contexts and external situational changes. Teacher agency is believed to be, amongst others, the capability to facilitate student learning (Pyhältö 2015). Through agency, teachers can feel empowered, successful and even game-changing (Beauchamp & Thomas 2009 p. 183). Agency can emerge from ~~different~~ ^{multiple} factors (amongst others): strong pedagogical practices, pedagogical innovation, but also continuous professional development, collegiality with other teachers, institutional and educational policies (e.g. Biesta et al., 2015). All these elements are systematically negotiated with and through others (colleagues, students, the institution, etc.) and contribute thus to various processes of positioning.

Teachers' agency can be significantly constructed through active participation, cooperation and belonging. It can also be restricted when confronted with dilemmas, contradictions, incoherent educational visions, and uncertainty (Biesta et al. 2015). Our hypothesis is that Intercultural Teacherhood can potentially disrupt teachers' agency, and thus have an ~~influence~~ ^{impact} on different actors' re-existential, interactive positioning and repositioning in the process of teaching.

The last aspect of continuum 2 is legitimacy, which goes hand in hand with positioning and agency as a facilitating force for the English teacher identity-Intercultural Teacherhood continuum. This concept (which is often used as a synonym of authority or authenticity in educational research) has been widely defined in the context of HE. However, to our knowledge, it remains unproblematised in relation to Intercultural Teacherhood. Gonzales and Teräs (2016) article entitled 'From the Faculty Perspective: Defining, Earning, and Maintaining Legitimacy Across Academic Disciplines' discusses legitimacy in the academic profession, which is very relevant for our context. Having used the method of conceptual interviews, to explore the meaning and conceptual dimensions of central terms used

All three teachers are qualified English teachers (tenured) from the School of Foreign Studies, which mainly focuses on English language teaching and research, English for Specific Purposes and foreign languages (Japanese and French). None of the three IC teachers majored in IC or related majors. Among them, two majored in Linguistics and applied linguistics. Teacher 1 has two PhD degrees (linguistics and education); Teacher 2 is a PhD candidate in English literature; Teacher 3 has a Master's in linguistics and was an early PhD candidate in Intercultural Communication at the time of interviewing.

The class setting is the same for the three teachers: mixed classes, in which local Chinese students study with international students, who are exchange students mostly from European countries (duration of stays in China: half a year to a year). The ratio between Chinese and exchange students varies from around 3:1:3.

A case study method was selected due to the exploratory nature of the research. Semi-structured interviews were organized so that the interviewer may just prepared questions or bring in new questions (Gibson & Hua, 2016 p. 194) so as to probe answers to a question further. More space was also provided for the interviewed teachers to talk freely and elaborate on their experiences.

The data are from multiple sources collected for half a year, including interviews of the three teachers, field notes and informal conversations with the teachers. Limited by space, this paper mainly presents our interpretation of data from the interviews, other data are supplementary if needed. Our interviews were conducted at the end of the semester, in quiet and private places such as the interviewees' offices.

such as a generic 'you' and an indirect formulation excluding her own voice (the class is mostly composed of... it requires definitely more time) to discuss increasing stress. This excerpt is difficult to analyze because it is hard to tell who the teacher refers to here (both in Chinese and English). As such it is unclear if she includes herself in what she is saying or plays the spokesperson for other teachers, and if this reveals any sense of illegitimacy or lack of agency regarding this aspect of her Intercultural Teacherhood. Increased workload has often been reported in studies on internationalization of HE (e.g. Chen 2019). It is important to note, however, that, whenever change appears, teachers will face extra workload, regardless of the context and the audience. This 'blinking' aspect of teacher identity is not limited to the context of internationalization.

Interestingly, while the other teachers focus mostly on content and course building when they discuss increased workload (see similar results in Chen 2019), for this teacher, the pressure and extra workload seem to relate to one uncertain element: the fact that teachers find it hard to guess what international students might be asking during the class. As such, Teacher 1 does not characterize this openly as 'uncertainty'.

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